

“The Perfecting of the Chopin Valse No. 14 in E Minor”

Questions for Understanding

1. In the beginning of the story, why does the main character turn off the shower and go down stairs naked and wet?
2. In the first section of the story, before the added space, what information about the situation can be gathered by the literary detective? What do we know about the two women? Just the facts!
3. What do you think “Hydropres” is? How is it significant to our understanding of the characters?
4. Why is it so significant to the main character, the daughter, that the mother’s playing of the waltz is improving? The mother herself comments “I’m improving. You always do, from time to time.” Is this true? Why is the daughter so sure this must be a “fluke”?
5. What does the narrator think when she sees her mother go into the garden at night to sit on the rock?
6. Throughout the story, the daughter is worried about her mother. List three of her main concerns or worries with a quote that expresses each. Are these concerns unusual or typical with regard to an aging parent?
7. What changes after the mother’s first night in the garden?
8. What happens at/with the rock on the second night? Why does this seem unlikely?
9. Why doesn’t the narrator ask her mother what she is doing in the garden?
10. Give three examples of things that seem impossible or magical about the party.
11. How does the party contrast with the main characters’ real lives?
12. Describe the unusual symptoms that the narrator begins to have during the story.
13. What is the crowning moment or climax of the party?
14. What does the narrator discover in the garden in the last section of the story?
15. List central elements of magic or fairy tale that appear in this story, or any mythical events or characters this story brings to mind.